

Joseph Kleponis– Two Poems

Louie's

Louie's was the place to be.

In the morning
kids would stop
to spend pennies, nickels, dimes,
on licorice sticks, bubble gum, juju beads
that they would secret away
and surreptitiously break out
when the monotony of the school day
became too much to bear.

On the way home
anyone who had a penny left over
might slide in
for a candy, or if flush, a coke.

Later the older kids,
the high school kids,
and the junior high kids
who should have been high school kids,
would take over stools at the counter
and order vanilla cokes or frappes,
and the boys would smile at the girls,
who would smile at the boys,
who would feed nickels into the jukebox,
and everyone would sway to tunes
until afternoon lengthened
and it came time to go home.

Then, men returning from work
would stop in to buy a paper,
or a pack of smokes,
and whisper numbers to Louie,
who would take a pencil from behind his ear
and scribble in a notebook.

Yes, Louie's was the place to be,
until the neighborhood school
stopped being the neighborhood school,
and the high school closed,
and men stopped taking the bus
to and from work,

and Louie retired to Florida
selling his store
to an alphabetized conglomerate
that doesn't stock candy
and removed the stools at the counter
but sells the state-run lottery scratchies
to locals like Sal
who never left the neighborhood
and stop by
for Keno and stale coffee
and memories
that fade fainter each day.

The Quarries

During the summer,
when the heat hung heavy,
all we wanted was to be cool,
so we hiked to the quarries.

We were as oblivious to the stories
of the dangers of diving at the quarries
as we were oblivious to the history
of how the rock had been cut
and hauled to Charlestown
over a hundred years before
to build the Bunker Hill Monument.
The only history we cared about
was our history that we would make
diving and retelling stories of diving
at the quarries.

The water, giant basins
of rainwater and snow-melt,
further fed by ground water springs,
was, we had heard,
cold, dark, and deep -
the surface so dense
clouds were not reflected in it
and what lay below was obscured.

Our perch and our launch was a ledge,
cut into the walls of granite
that rose in jagged angles
twenty feet or more
above the water.

Over one lip of the quarry,
tops of trees, still green, rose skyward,
over another, the towers of the Hancock and the Pru
were barely visible
through the summery haze.

Like the men who had labored there,
purposefully cutting and shaping blocks of stone
for a historical monument,
we worked at cutting and shaping our legacy
as we surveyed and plotted
how we would leap outward,
flinging ourselves as far from the rocky edge
and as far into air as we could,
so we would land, in what we imagined,
was a spot of cold, wet, sweetness.

Even now, in memory,
like a dream but not dream-like,
I can feel the exhilarating terror
of feet no longer on solid ground,
of hurtling out through the heat,
all an intoxicating blur,
and the knowledge,
the terrible knowledge,
that a decision, once made,
will unfold in the arc of its course
leading to denouement,
that unlike fixed monuments of stone
cut and shaped by willful men,
will take its own shape and form,
leaving its own impact.

Joseph Kleponis has taught English and American Literature in schools north of Boston. His poetry has been published in online and print journals including, *The Aurorean*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Eucalypt*, *First Literary Review -East*, *Leaflet: the Journal of the New England Teachers of English*, and *Penmen Review of Southern New Hampshire University* as well as *Muddy River Poetry Review*.